

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 19, 2012

8:05 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Kevin Meyer, Co-Chair
Senator Joe Thomas, Co-Chair
Senator Bettye Davis, Vice Chair
Senator Hollis French
Senator Gary Stevens

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

University of Alaska presentation: President Pat Gamble

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

PATRICK GAMBLE, President
University of Alaska System
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Delivered the University of Alaska Presentation.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:05:52 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR KEVIN MEYER called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:05 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators French, Stevens, Davis, Co-Chair Thomas and Co-Chair Meyer.

University of Alaska Presentation by President Patrick Gamble

[8:06:19 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER announced that the business before the committee was to hear a presentation on the University of Alaska by President Patrick Gamble. He is a retired four-star general and has been with the University for a couple of years following a distinguished nine-year service as president and CEO of the Alaska Railroad. He asked President Gamble to talk about where the University is headed, his goals and missions.

[8:07:47 AM](#)

PATRICK GAMBLE, President, University of Alaska System, Fairbanks, Alaska, said rather than giving a large opening monologue he would touch on a couple of questions the committee gave him. He said he wanted to set the stage for the Strategic Direction Initiative (SDI) that has been going on for about eight or nine months.

He related that when he came before the joint Education committees last year he sensed a "continuous drumbeat that something needed work." He said the number of testimonies heard in that meeting was really an eye-opener in terms of a lot of education issues in general and the associated teacher issues that went hand in hand with the student issues.

MR. GAMBLE said when he got there, the University had a strategic plan that was supposed to run through 2009 that has not been updated. So, one of the first places he, as a new guy started was changing the SDI, because it was out of date. As he got further along and began talking with faculty, he realized that updating an entire university system strategic plan was a good sized job and also sends fear through a lot of people, because he was not an educator.

[8:10:53 AM](#)

MR. GAMBLE said he realized that being a dictator or running the University like the military or a corporation wasn't going to work, because the idea of governance is based on the participation of a number of interested groups, all the way from the faculty through the state through the students, themselves; and these groups exist at each of the three separate accredited universities. He had to try to build consensus among all the groups in terms of making any changes. The term "direction" became his operative work. Having a five year goal presupposed failure if they weren't met, and he believed that education is a journey Pre-K through grade 20; one part begets another. He elaborated that you move forward as your university system develops, as the demand develops and workforce need become more apparent. You have to meet the requirements of those who are

putting demands on you within the fiscal and physical capability to meet them.

What he noticed most is that the outdated strategic plan talked about growing the university system and for 10 to 12 years, that is what happened. Every single year the legislature allowed the university to grow by funding the growth areas and culturally, a number of faculty and staff knew nothing other than growth. Then the economy started going down, and the nation was shifting from input for growth to measuring outputs. In the university system that meant shifting to figuring out how many graduates there were and if they were being hired. People were looking for a return on the investments they were making not just growing to meet demand.

[8:15:53 AM](#)

He said the SDI was shifted to make the college experience a journey of continuous improvement, more like a business that measures the customers' needs and improves its services. It envisioned making the University an attractive experience where students are helped in getting through. For instance, the Neiman Marcus model makes its name on service and they get repeat customers from it. The University wants repeat customers, too, he said and removing obstacles to efficient graduation cycles is all part of output services that need to be improved. He said he wanted to raise the level of education across the board from 30 percent to the 63 percent people are saying Alaska will need by 2016.

[8:17:41 AM](#)

MR. GAMBLE said the University is in a huge information gathering phase right now and is in the midst of holding 80 listening sessions throughout the state in which they are asking questions written by the faculty, staff and students for themselves - details of "the good, bad and the ugly." When that is done, they will stack up the answers in categories like transfer of credits or partnerships with businesses or other universities. Within each one of the categories, comments will be arranged from the most to the least and then the volatility factor will be added. Within all the individual comments, they will look for common threads, themes, denominators, that are repeated over and over again.

[8:20:03 AM](#)

When all the information is categorized and collated, the information will be framed into issue statements and problem statements. Then they will ask the same people to devise

strategies that will fix the problems and change the direction. But, Mr. Gamble, emphasized that they want to make sure to keep doing the things well that are already being done well.

[8:22:03 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS commented that one of the most valuable things that has occurred in the last four or five years has been a better connection between the legislature and the University. When he first got here 12 years ago, there was no connection other than through the Finance Committee.

He said the Alaska Performance Scholarship (APS) program is off to a slow start, which is understandable for the brand new program, but it seems that it could have an enormous impact on the University. He asked Mr. Gamble how he was preparing to deal with a lot more students attending the UA system.

[8:23:08 AM](#)

MR. GAMBLE answered that the data is quite incomplete now. For the first year, probably many people already had plans for their kids and elected not to change them. He was interested in what the second and third year data would show. He was surprised by the small number of eligible students overall for the scholarships and it caught their attention the most. But everyone agreed to not overreact to the first year. Fourth year courses need to be added and teachers need to be trained who can teach those fourth year courses.

[8:25:31 AM](#)

He said they can bring a lot more students in, but if the attrition rate stays as high as it is, a lot more students are going to go out, too. That must be fixed and that is the whole purpose of SDI. Not all freshmen students are going to be first year freshmen coming right out of high school; about 1,000 a year elect to come into college for their freshman year.

[8:26:32 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS asked him to compare the APS with the existing program. Students tell her they want "needs-based" scholarships and asked what the University is going to do about that. Many could graduate earlier (in less than six years) if they didn't have to work as much.

SENATOR DAVIS also said she keeps hearing about his "P20 system" and wanted to know how that fits in with the APS program.

[8:27:49 AM](#)

MR. GAMBLE answered that he was trying to be more flexible with scholarships. Right now, the number of students who receive scholarships and don't complete college is a bothersome number. Most scholarships go to a student whose only performance has been in high school, but the governor's program adds a considerable amount of money and instead of adding on to the same program, they have the potential to free up dollars that were formerly for scholarships for high school students and look at some alternative ways of helping students who are already successful in college. For example, a C student who had no hope of getting a scholarship, but made through his first year in college, he envisioned rewarding that student for having made it through the first semester and actually giving them tuition forgiveness or a scholarship at that point. If they make it through the second year (the first two are the critical years in college in terms of attrition), tuition could be forgiven again; the cost of a credit hour could be also be reduced in the third and fourth years. So, from a business-like point of view, the return on investment in the first two years of education is poor; but if you get through the first two years, the return on investment for the second two years of a four-year program is good.

MR. GAMBLE said they are looking at some innovative things like charging more tuition for the first and second years with the agreement that if you are successful, some of it is forgiven and the cost of years three and four are bought down with tuition reductions. Instead of just rewarding what was done in high school, performance in college would be rewarded as well, and then dangling a carrot out there in the future saying, "You're really doing good now."

[8:30:27 AM](#)

He didn't know how that would overall affect the ability to pay, because the concept is completely different from than anything they have done before. They are trying to give every student who can walk in the door the opportunity to have financial assistance; and it's a combination of needs-based but then the student has to perform at the same time. If they didn't get that scholarship in high school, they will be given a second chance in college.

[8:31:02 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS asked if that was part of the discussions they are having with people throughout the state.

MR. GAMBLE answered in a general sense, like he is talking to them. There is a lot enthusiasm among the number crunchers that this broadens the opportunity for a lot more students. The secret is to include "all our students."

[8:32:12 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER said one of the dilemmas they are having with the scholarship program is that it initially came out as a strictly merit scholarship program, which everyone agreed with, because it raised academic standards in high schools so that kids are better prepared for college. Then needs-based was added and he struggles with wondering if they are really helping students by giving them scholarships if they are not adequately prepared academically for college. If a student can't do the course work, it makes him feel like a failure and it sets the University back, because the student either needs more remedial work or he drops out, which doesn't look good for the numbers. Alaska doesn't have a community college; so if you want to go to college here you have to go right out of high school. Could that be part of the reason for the attrition rate?

[8:33:46 AM](#)

MR. GAMBLE answered that there are two issues: one is if you give scholarships you raise expectations, and if they can't meet those expectations, that's a crushing defeat for a young student and the University is losing money. He said SKI is trying to help students make it through college despite some setbacks. If that is done year after year and nothing is changed, then that is truly a waste. He was trying to figure out how to do both: offer the needs-based student the advantages that they have to have to be successful as well as provide the incentive he just talked about to get a student through the first two years and then get them on through graduation.

[8:35:08 AM](#)

SENATOR FRENCH asked what the statistics are regarding a needs-based scholarship recipient's performance.

MR. GAMBLE answered that was one of the great "black holes" that they have to fill. With the focus on inputs for so many years, they don't have any output information. They can say how many students graduated, but they have no idea how many didn't and why. They don't have any idea why teachers didn't get hired or why they left. Getting that data is part of what they are going to be doing.

[8:36:19 AM](#)

MR. GAMBLE said the community campuses are an important component, because they are the most flexible element of our system. Currently, every student coming into the system is required to take a placement test. Then it will stack them at whatever level they are at. Placement used to be optional; you didn't have to go in at that level if you had decided you were going to study harder and take a harder course. But then you might not make it through. Now they are mandating that students go in at the placement test level. If it's a remedial level, that's where you go. That at least reduces the portion of the students who think they are better than they are and find out that they are not.

[8:37:40 AM](#)

He said a lot of data had been coming out of universities for three or four years throughout the U.S. on outputs, because other schools are ahead of Alaska in their budget cuts have implemented things that UA is only talking about now. So, he is beginning to see their data and figuring out what might be applicable to the UA system. He said it's clear that there is only so much you can do if a student is not prepared to enter college. So, the idea that preparation has to be worked through the education continuum without any great big gaps is really important.

MR. GAMBLE remarked that he has this crazy idea about accountability, that if the public schools had to pay the university for every developmental class they had to teach because of a student not being at the appropriate level when they graduate from high school, they would see the problem in high school probably get fixed pretty quickly. Right now college hires the instructors, has the classes and pays that bill. The high school could say the same about coming out of junior high unprepared for high school work. But right now they don't even have data on the high school graduates when they come to college, so they are working that problem, too.

[8:40:01 AM](#)

Ultimately, he said, so much depends on preparation, and the senior year is the third critical year in the three they are looking at. You have the first two years in college and you've got your senior in high school, and that is the year the student needs to be on their game. They need to be loaded down and working as hard as they have ever worked so that the gap between that level of effort and the level of effort they are going to have to put in as a freshman is reduced. He said that gap just

has to be fixed and he wasn't sure the university could do that one.

MR. GAMBLE said that he had met with the Anchorage School District and the Board of Regents and has a meeting in June with the State School Board to talk about such things.

8:41:11 AM

SENATOR THOMAS agreed that there is a education continuum and he had the greatest confidence that Mr. Gamble would work some of the issues out. But his experience in working with various departments is that all we already have all the research in the world, but most of it's done outside the state of Alaska. Big organizations made up of educators study these things and they know what needs to be done. Yet when they sit here, they are growing the Department of Corrections at the expense of Education, because they are not addressing known issues.

He said plenty of people know what could and should be done, and this applies to other departments, as well, but there seems to be a reluctance to analyze already existing data. The DNR and DOL, for instance, with the oil issue, were woefully incapable of analyzing the data and didn't even ask for money to do it. And then they didn't share the report until someone found it out.

SENATOR THOMAS said if you just demand that people come up with the suggested changes, people would flock to his office with probably more information than he needs. University people tell him that all the time. He also thought that the University should grow in some areas like research and let others go.

8:44:31 AM

MR. GAMBLE said he was talking about "program review," a term of art. He related that when he first started working at the University he asked for a list of all its programs. About four months later, he had a big stack of 600-plus programs dropped on his desk. He is talking about courses and the University has about 550. In the days when UA was all things to all people, that was fine, until budget constraints showed up. Programs that don't generate a return because of lack of enrollment need to be pruned and UAF and UAS have already stepped way out in doing those reviews.

8:46:50 AM

MR. GAMBLE said that advising and counseling was poorly done at the UA. It's the biggest item in their budget this year and it's

probably one of the single most important things they lack doing well right now. The idea people have of counseling or advising is very different than the very broad and comprehensive type of advising that is needed to get students through college. He said students are out there making decisions on their own and they don't have anyone to go to that can really stay with them all the way through their experience. The idea is to intervene when a student is having a problem, not count their loss the next semester when they don't show up again, which is how it's done now. An advisor should be more like a path finder or a navigator; taking that student in and staying with him. He tells them what courses will transfer and which ones they have to catch up on. That kind of advising reduces the debt load on the students as well as the cost per graduate to the University.

MR. GAMBLE elaborated that this type of advising is very sophisticated; it's not an academic advisor like you get when you are a junior or a senior engineering major. This is concierge, personal shopper, friend, confidant, all wrapped up into one using a sophisticated computer program that looks for key words in a students database. The students actually talks socially to their file and if they use words like "family problems" or "homesick," the advisor is alerted and intervenes with the student at that point.

He said that UAA had been testing this on 400-plus students for a year, and it has resulted in a significant improvement and he hoped it would make a big difference (maybe 10 percent) in future completion figures.

[8:49:37 AM](#)

MR. GAMBLE said the way credit transfers are done had to be changed. The issue is not that credits don't transfer, but that students make assumptions about what they can take with a lack of advising. They find out after the fact that they were wrong, and then they try to petition and find out that it's not petition-able. Then it becomes a complaint and the complaint is that the credits didn't transfer. Another example was a student applies for work experience credit during the summer; the answer comes back in four weeks after the semester started that the credits didn't transfer. With a good advising program, that goes away.

He said they have found that most of UA courses do transfer quite nicely, particularly in the first two years. But the feeling is that, especially in the first two years, core courses ought to basically transfer laterally and vertically through the

entire system. All three major academic units (MAU) are working to refine that.

MR. GAMBLE said only a couple hundred student come from outside and it used to be that about 52 percent of college eligible kids went outside and now that 52 percent are staying in the state. The statistics for going outside have actually flip-flopped. Most of the recruiting from outside is done at the higher level.

[8:52:54 AM](#)

MR. GAMBLE addressed Division I sports saying it's a very complicated issue. He had a handout from the UAF athletic director summarizing what is involved. First, you have to be invited to be in Division I sports, and you have to pay a fee to get in (about \$1.4 million); you have to have facility and coach standards (a majority of the UA athletics would have to elevated). UA is one of the small categories of universities that are allowed to participate in both Division I and II even though it's a Division II school. Not everybody can do that. To go to Division I, the coaches would have to be paid a lot more, new facilities would probably have to be built or arrangements made, but most importantly, UA would have to be invited in by a conference, first. One of the problems up here would be that all those conference teams would have to travel to Alaska, which would add quite a bit to their costs.

[8:54:28 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said he was just at the UCLA Anderson School of Business and faculty there were complaining that they had a lot of outstanding Chinese students, but they couldn't get their "green card" and couldn't stay. In this instance the US is educating some of the finest students in the world and they can't stay in the country. He asked if that was happening at in Alaska.

[8:55:00 AM](#)

MR. GAMBLE answered that he knew foreign students were in our athletic programs; he did not know whether they actually had to leave the country.

[8:55:40 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR MEYER said he was convinced that the outside college his daughter went to was attracted to her because she paid non-resident tuition. Because so many tourists come to Alaska because they love the mystique, he was wondering if that trend could be reversed using the Alaska mystique.

[8:56:47 AM](#)

MR. GAMBLE answered that approximately 1,500 college eligible high school graduates go to school outside; about 2,000 of them stay and about 200 are recruited from outside. When he is visiting undergraduate students, he always hears one of the big pluses of going to the UA system is if you are in a degree program, the opportunity for an undergraduate to actually put their hands on research is far higher than in Lower 48 universities where you normally sit in a lecture room and read. If more outside students knew about that, more would come up here. He added that research at UAF is "internationally cutting edge stuff."

[8:58:45 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS asked what they are doing with the community college system.

[8:59:41 AM](#)

MR. GAMBLE answered that the community campus system is essential for Bush students. Some of the schools there can't even qualify for the scholarship program, either needs-based or merit-based. The core course work needs to be lined up in the community campuses so that it automatically flows right into a degree, with the help of good advising.

He explained that the reason they aren't community colleges is because only three communities contribute cash to the college system: Kenai and Kodiak get dollars from the community and Prince William Sound Community College is a separately accredited school. Going back to community colleges means that every one of those communities would have to contribute to the campus and that is the why it didn't work before.

[9:02:09 AM](#)

SENATOR DAVIS commented that the community college issue should be part of the discussion in both rural and urban areas.

[9:03:12 AM](#)

MR. GAMBLE said that E-Learning is everywhere now, and 30 percent of the kids in the dorms at UAF are taking courses online along with going to classes. This again is where kids need advising. He said you can get most of a four-year nursing degree out in the Bush and then come into Anchorage for three-week clinicals for exposure to real patients. He said the issue now is really bandwidth.

CO-CHAIR MEYER thanked President Gamble for the presentation.

9:06:10 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Meyer adjourned the Senate Education Committee meeting at 9:06 a.m.